

4. [The existence of transboundary waters and the management decisions relating to their use and protection are of significant importance to their riparian owners. In these circumstances special action may well be necessary to establish appropriate multilateral or bilateral agreements to ensure that riparian rights and practices fully take into account their mutual interests and the need to protect the waters from transboundary impacts.]

5. Water-related diseases are still a major health problem, especially in the developing countries. Diseases caused by microbiological pollution of water supplies or transmitted by water-associated vectors, and those related to inadequate sanitation and absence of clean water, are widespread. With water use per capita expected to increase significantly in developing countries with high economic or population growth rates, the volume of waste requiring treatment is expected to present a growing problem. Likewise, the application of water-intensive production techniques and other high water-use consumption patterns are of concern in certain countries, particularly industrial ones. To ignore the interactions and linkages between freshwater issues and other sectoral issues could result in severe social, economic or human health consequences. Therefore, the provision of water supply and sanitation in developing countries is not only a vital ingredient of economic and social development but also an important element of environmental protection.

II. GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF AGENDA 21

6. Water is a necessity of all life. The overall objective is to maintain the hydrological, biological and chemical functions of ecosystems to adapt human activities to the limits of nature's carrying capacity and to control water-related disease vectors.

7. Freshwater resources are an essential component of the earth's hydrosphere and an indispensable part of all terrestrial ecosystems. The freshwater environment is characterized by its hydrological regime including floods and droughts which, in some regions, have become more extreme and dramatic in their consequences in recent years. Global climate changes could also have their impact on freshwater resources and their availability and, through sea level rise, threaten coastal aquifers and small island ecosystems.

8. Freshwaters are a finite resource, not only indispensable for the sustenance of life on earth but also of vital importance to all socio-economic sectors. Development is not possible without considerable exploitation of water sources in relation to other land use activities and the control of deforestation and desertification. Priority must be given to the sustenance of land/water ecosystems, with particular attention to wetlands and biodiversity, and the satisfaction of basic human needs for drinking water, health protection and food security. For any water utilization beyond this, freshwater resources have to be considered as an economic good with an opportunity cost in alternative uses.

9. The Mar del Plata Action Plan, which emerged from the United Nations Water Conference in 1977, remains generally valid as the common basis for national and international action programmes in the freshwater sector. The review of progress achieved in its implementation and resulting strategies for the 1990s are reflected in Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/... . Agenda 21 in this sector, as presented hereunder, is based on these strategies, on the results of the Global Consultation on Safe Water and Sanitation for the 1990s, held at New Delhi in September 1990 (General Assembly resolution 45/181) and on the recommendations which may emerge from the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin, January 1992, and on the results of the Preparatory Committee.

10. The wide-spread scarcity of freshwater resources, the progressive encroachment of incompatible activities and the gradual destruction of freshwater resources and their aggravating